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ABSTRACT

A sample of 15-year-old children in London were interviewed with regard to their vocational wishes, the reasons for these, their plans for preparatory study or training, and relevant aspects of their school experience. Considerable overlap was found between the constructs underlying occupational wishes and liking or disliking for school subjects, which in turn depended on the quality of teaching and on experience of success or failure in those subjects. It was found that school, through its teaching and disciplinary methods and general atmosphere, tended to build up a positive or negative attitude to work which often decisively affected the child's motivation, his chances of success, the age at which he wished to leave school and his willingness to contemplate further education. The school ethos importantly affected attitudes toward authority and rules and discipline, but often failed to give the experience of responsibility which might have given more reality to adolescent thinking about the future. (Author)

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SCHOOL AND THE DEVELOPING CONCEPTS OF WORK, RESPONSIBILITY AND FREEDOM

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SCHOOL AND THE DEVELOPING CONCEPTS OF WORK, RESPONSIBILITY AND FREEDOM

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At the last meeting of this society I reported with a colleague on the views of a sample of English children interviewed in a longitudial study at the ages of 7, 12, and 15, concerning the advantages and disadvantages of various times of life, sex roles, marriage and parenthood (Moore & Clautour, 1977). In discussing these questions it seemed that the children progressively became disillusioned with the prospects ahead of them, especially the thought of adult work and responsibility, as they entered adolescence, and tended to overvalue the notion of freedom and an easy life which they believe to characterize the later teen-age years. To investigate these attitudes more closely, I have now looked at the same children's responses to certain other questions in the interviews at 15 - questions concerning their expectations and wishes in relation to adult occupation and preparations for it, and concerning aspects of their school experience relevant to their ideas of work, responsibility and freedom.

The choice of occupation by an individual is a matter of reconciling:-

1) realistic possibilities, based on
   a. his/her abilities
   b. availability of the necessary education/training
   c. availability of jobs

2) external pressures from
   a. economic circumstances
   b. parental wishes
   c. advice from elsewhere

3) internal pressures: unconscious dynamics determine personal constructs about various kinds of work, the constructs incorporating
   a. Cognitive concepts, varying from realistic to fantastic
   b. affective evaluations (liking or disliking) based on presently felt needs
   c. conative interest in working toward certain kinds of occupation and avoiding other kinds.

(My debt to George Kelly (1955, 1970) does not inhibit me from combining his valuable notion of personal constructs with ideas from elsewhere, notably Hill & Scharff's (1976) psychodynamic insights.)

As we shall see, there is a significant overlap in the personal constructs underlying occupational wishes and liking or disliking for school subjects, which in turn depends significantly on the quality of teaching and the child's experience of success or failure in those subjects. More generally, school can build up, through its teaching and disciplinary methods and general atmosphere, a positive or negative attitude to work as such, especially to study, which can decisively affect the child's motivation to work, his chances of success, the age at which he wishes to leave school and his willingness to contemplate further education. More broadly

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still, the school ethos does much, often in unintended ways, to shape attitudes to authority, rules and discipline, and concepts of responsibility and freedom emerge as semi-articulate reactions, often without being worked through either in thought or in practice.

Society requires young people to shape their lives at a stage when they are insufficiently prepared to do so. Careers guidance, however expert, cannot remedy this unpreparedness. The question therefore is whether the school could do something to remedy it during the years before the child and his parents are faced with this crucial decision.

THE INVESTIGATION

The data come from a longitudial study of child development carried out in London with children born between 1951 and 1954. The sample, 68 boys and 48 girls, representing all social classes, is described in the paper already quoted (Moore & Clautour, 1977). The children were scattered over a wide area in and around London, and attending secondary schools of all types - grammar, secondary modern, comprehensive and private.They were asked, at 15, what kind of work they expected to do, what kind they would really like to do if they could, whether they knew anyone who did it, and what attracted them to these occupations.

We are here concerned not with the occupations chosen but with the reasons given for these choices and the common themes, or constructs, linking these reasons with those given for liking or disliking school subjects and other aspects of school life.

Constructs underlying occupational choice

1. Interest and liking for the activities thought to be involved in an occupation, or for their objects or products, were given as reasons for choice of occupation by about 85% of both boys and girls. The use of these general constructs often implies that the child has not analysed his choice more deeply, but it was usually possible to elicit the source of the interest, as follows:-

   a) Interest in school subjects appeared relevant in two ways. Some jobs were seen as direct extensions of practical activities (typing, woodwork, art, football) enjoyed at school. The more academic subjects were seen as providing information useful in a variety of work; in these cases the children's ideas of relevance varies from realistic to naive, as Hill & Scharff (1976) illustrate.

   b) Interest stimulated by experience acquired outside school had a more convincing flavour but was limited to the kinds of experience open to children. These included spare time jobs such as shop assistant, van boy, motor mechanic and looking after children; and hobbies such as photography, cooking, hairdressing and animal care.

   c) Interest in activities not personally experienced could be acquired from friends or relatives in any kind of work, especially parents (but few in our sample attempted to press children into work which did not appeal to them); from careers talks or visits and TV documentaries, which occasionally provided useful ideas;

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and from fictional films and books, which tended to attract to romantic callings.

d) Interests centring on the objects or products of activity rather than on the work as such included work with animals and children, librarianship, architecture and work in shops selling clothes, music or other specialized products. Hill & Scharff suggest that a deeply rooted interest in the material with which one works may to some extent compensate for the routine nature and subordinate status of many jobs open to young people.

2. A feeling of competence ("I can do it well") was expressed by about 30% of boys and 10% of girls with reference to the aspects of chosen work already experienced in school subjects, sports or hobbies. Such a feeling obviously reinforces interest and liking. A few even thought of work in which their competence would be practically useful to them and their families (electrician, mechanic, clothing machinist).

3. Creative satisfaction ("I like making things/expressing my ideas/ the idea of beautifying homes/building houses and bridges") was explicitly expressed by nearly 30% of boys and 20% of girls, in relation not only to artistic and expressive work (writing, acting, dress design, window display etc.) and constructional occupations (engineering, carpentry, furniture design) but also scientific work and business enterprise.

   Closely related is the aesthetic satisfaction derived from working with certain materials or with tools and machines: e.g. (from a would-be welder): "I did some at school, and found I got a great amount of pleasure - the way the metal went together, and the fluid and the flame...". And from a greengrocer's boy: "I dunno, I just like the work. I like stacking up the fruit nicely, and cutting the lettuce. The leaves go brown if you don't."

4. Movement is a feature of working life so strongly desired by some children that it seems to reflect a deep need. About 40% of boys and over 25% of girls expressed this desire for movement in one of three ways:-

   - for physically active work (footballer, sports coach, dancing teacher)
   - for non-sedentary work (van boy, electrician, policeman)
   - most commonly, for work involving travel (air pilot, air hostess, seaman, journalist, buyer, naturalist, etc.)

5. Variety was mentioned by 10-15% of both sexes over a wide choice of occupations, and excitement by 5-10% (boys: air pilot, footballer; girls: journalist). Here again, the dread is of stasis, boredom and drudgery. See the insightful discussion by Keniston (1971) p. 10.

6. Contact with others ("You meet people"; "You can chat") was mentioned as an important factor in choosing work by nearly 40% of girls, and is one of the attractions of bein, an air hostess, a journalist or an office worker. 15% of boys also named it in various connections.

7. Responsibility and autonomy were mentioned by 6 boys (9%) in relation

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to owning a business, being an MP, a teacher or a film director; and by only one girl (own shop). Since most of these adolescents were complaining about adult infringements of their autonomy, its rarity as an occupational goal deserves attention: see Discussion.

8. Fame was dreamed of by 7 boys (10%) in the roles of footballer, jockey, scientist, comedian and pop singer; and by three girls (foreign correspondent, actress, artist or novelist-poet). Admission of this motive was often made a little sheepishly, and it is probably much commoner than these figures suggest as an element in fantasy wishes. At a more realistic level, prestige was seen as an attraction of the air pilot's job.

9. Social service was mentioned by 17% of girls and 7% of boys, the girls in relation to the helping professions (teaching, nursing, social work, police work), both sexes (one of each) in relation to science, the remaining boys wanting to be an engineer, an air pilot, a travel agent and a comedian ("I like to make people laugh and feel happy; it makes me feel happy too.")

10. Pay was mentioned by only 25% of boys and 10% of girls.

    Prospects of advancement attracted four of the same boys, four others (12% in all) and two girls.

    Security (a steady job), on the other hand, was named by only 5 boys (7%) and no girls.

11. Incidental advantages such as free time, holidays, recreational facilities, uniform, etc., attracted 6 girls and 2 boys.

For most 15-year olds the intangible satisfactions seem considerably more important than the material. The most frequently mentioned constructs in rank order for the two sexes were:-

Boys	Girls
Interest	Interest
Movement	Contact with people
Creative satisfaction	Movement
Feeling of competence	Creative satisfaction
Pay	Social service

The reasons given for liking school subjects embody some of the same constructs as reasons for occupational choice:-

1. Interest is again the commonest reason, mentioned by about 55% of both boys and girls in relation to most subjects, but especially English (girls), sciences (boys) and social studies (both).

2. Creative satisfaction ranks second with about 30% mention by both sexes in relation to practical subjects, art, written English and drama.

3. A feeling of competence comes third, named by 20-25% of both sexes in relation to many different subjects. Some said they found the subject easy, some that they got good marks and others that they felt satisfied with their work.

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4. Responsibility/autonomy, which was rare as a vocational aim, occurs more frequently here among boys (25%) but only in 3 girls (6%). It is variously expressed: "You can work on your own without being shown"; "You can use your own ideas and see how they work out"; "Problems make you think for yourself"; "We can decide what we want to study and do it in our own time". These remarks were made by boys about art, English, mathematics and biology; by girls about English discussion lessons.

5. The constructs of movement, variety and contact with others occurred in relation to practical subjects, drama, project work and other lessons allowing for activity and interaction between pupils. They were not given the prominence here that they achieved among occupational goals, perhaps because they seldom figure in the teaching of more academic subjects.

6. A more general construct, relevance to life (including both social and practical usefulness and relevance to the child's own chosen career) occurred in 18-20% of boys and girls with reference to practical subjects, oral and written English, languages, social studies and (among boys) mathematics and science.

7. Finally, in addition to these constructs describing characteristics of the subjects themselves, good teaching was frequently mentioned (by 27% of boys and 37% of girls) as a reason for enjoying lessons. The importance of the teacher in stimulating or stultifying the will to work at subjects which may be crucial to the pupil's career can scarcely be overemphasized.

Attitudes to School and Further Educational Plans (Table 1 here)

On the basis of a discussion of various aspects of school life, the children's general attitudes to school were rated by the interviewer (CBH) on a 7-point scale. The distributions are shown in the left-hand columns on table 1. The right-hand part of the table shows the children's expectations of further education, so far as these could be determined at 15, analysed according to attitude to school.

As the sub-totals make clear, children with positive attitudes were those most likely to stay on at school and continue with further full-time education, while those with negative or mixed attitudes were more likely to leave school early ($X^2(1) = 15{,}303$, $p < .001$.) Although not shown separately for lack of space, it is noteworthy that of 22 children planning to leave at the minimum age (then 15), 15 had negative and only 3 had positive attitudes to school. Of those planning further full-time education, none had strong or unqualified negative attitudes. Of the 24 children with no plans for education after school, 17 were girls.

Children who have to abandon their cherished ambitions (which may not, of course, be realistic for them) need time and help to replace them with an occupational goal which will satisfy at least some of their personal needs. There were a number of children, especially girls, whom school, even if they enjoyed it, had left with a feeling of personal incompetence in matters pertaining to work, which was not warranted by their actual performance. Such children tend to leave early, because it seems to them and their parents that the school has nothing further

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to offer them. But this may prematurely cut them off from the chance of further development and land them in work which may be quite unsuitable to them.

Reasons for Attitudes to School (Table 2 here)

Table 2 classifies the responses of boys and girls of 15 to questions concerning what they liked and disliked about school. Here again, some of the basic needs expressed in relation to choice of occupation and school subjects reappear, the corresponding items on the left and right of the table representing the positive and negative poles of the same construct.

1. The salient importance of interest, whether generalized or limited to certain subjects, is expressed both positively and negatively: "I like learning" or "The lessons are boring".

2. The ease or difficulty of work, the pleasure of coping and worry when one can't, again bring out the importance of the feeling of competence or its absence.

3. The next few items bear on the need for self-respect and the construct of responsibility. Many adolescents felt that the way they were treated by adults, the uniform they were required to wear, the rules restricting their behaviour and the punishments they saw as unreasonable were damaging to their self-respect, and discouraged them from taking personal responsibility for their actions. Resentment on these accounts, expressed in surly and rebellious behaviour resented by the teachers in their turn, tended to spoil teacher-pupil relationships for a good many. Some of these complained about teachers in general ("They are always moaning"; "They tell us off for the tiniest thing"; "They criticize our clothes and hair"; "They hit us"; "They interfere as if they own you"), but many distinguished between individual teachers. A common remark was: "The old teachers don't understand us, but the younger ones do; you can talk to them."

4. This shows up the need for good personal contact. Some children spoke with warm appreciation of teachers who "put themselves to the utmost to get on with you"; "joke with you"; "are firm but kind and don't pick on you"; "are helpful and friendly". But for most children, as the next item in the table shows, this need for personal contact is gratified chiefly through being with their friends, which for many is the great and sometimes the only attraction of school. Satisfying personal contact of course involves communication (as with the teachers one can talk to); hence the popularity of discussion periods and the frequent resentment about being told off for talking in class. "Free-time activities and fun" likewise suggest pleasure shared with others. The complaints that school monopolizes one's time, is no fun and nothing but boring, useless routine are characteristic of the disaffected child who has withdrawn herself from social as well as intellectual involvement. Others did, however, see aspects of school as having relevance to life, and a few found nothing they disliked about it at all.

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TABLE 1 : Attitudes to school and educational plans at 15 years

Attitudes to school	Boys	Girls	Total	Expectations						
				Continue schooling to 17 - 19				Leave school at 15 - 16		
				University	Other education full t.	Other education part t.	Nil or no plans	Further education full t.	Further education part t.	Nil or no plans
Strongly positive	8	5								
Positive	7 (41 (60%))	1 (25 (52%))	66	18	17	6	3	6	9	7
Qualified positive	26	19				44			22	
Mixed/ uncertain	7 (10%)	10 (21%)	17	3	2	1	0	2	4	5
						6			11	
Qualified negative	15	10								
Negative	2 (20 (30%))	1 (13 (27%))	33	2	0	5	2	4	13	7
Strongly negative	3	2				9			24	
Totals	68	48	116	23	19	12	5	12	26	19
						59			57	

TABLE 2: Aspects of School Liked and Disliked, 15 years

Liked	Boys %	Girls %	Disliked	Boys %	Girls %
Interest in work: general	50	37	Boring work, bad teaching	9	18
Interest in certain subjects	15	28	Dislike certain subjects	22	20
Interest in sports	10	6	Dislike sports/Cadet corps	12	2
Work not too hard, can cope well	12	4	Work too hard, too much, can't keep up, worrying	28	31
Good atmosphere, "treated as grown up"	4	12	Bad atmosphere "treated as infants"	10	14
Rules reasonable	3	4	Rules restrictive, "petty"	18	22
Like the uniform	0	0	Dislike the uniform	3	18
Responsibility	6	4	Too much responsibility	0	2
			Lax discipline	2	0
			Punishments unreasonable	20	8
Like teachers generally	16	6	Dislike teachers, generally	10	35
Like teachers individually	6	0	Dislike teachers, individually	21	12
Like being with friends	52	70	Dislike some children (bullies)	10	2
Free time activities, fun	15	16	Monopolizes time, no fun	12	18
Variety	4	2	Boring routine	6	16
Relevance to life	4	18	Irrelevance to life	3	2
Good premises, facilities	9	2	Poor premises, facilities	3	0
Like the food	2	0	Dislike the food	3	2
Nothing disliked	9	4	Nothing liked	3	3

DISCUSSION

How important is it that a child should enjoy school?
We have seen that the attitude to it is correlated with the age of leaving, and that some who leave early may thereby curtail their chances of development and a satisfying work life. Others, it is true, continue their studies at colleges where they may gain self-respect and more autonomy in study, but at the cost of losing their classmates who (if not themselves too disaffected) might have helped them further on the journey to maturity. The very strong positive attachment to friends could surely be used to better advantage in school. Affection and fun can be creative.

At 15 and 16 many are still clinging to unrealistic occupational wishes, governed by constructs such as fame, travel and excitement, and when these have finally to be abandoned, have nothing to replace them (Hill & Scharff, 1976). In discussing times of life, sex roles and marriage, our 15-year olds were still largely governed by a longing for freedom, an easy life, and avoidance of responsibility (Moore & Clautour, 1977). In this paper, however, we have seen that some of them, especially boys, felt the need for responsibility and autonomy, expressing this less often in occupational choice than in their attitudes to school work and their objections to treatment which seemed to them to deny these needs. Girls, too, although they seem to lack the delight that some boys take in grappling with problems on their own, take just as much exception to adult infringement of their autonomy.

The freedom demanded by adolescents is first of all the right to decide for oneself what one will do. Often, of course, this means choosing pleasure, fun, doing as one's agemates are doing rather than as the adults wish in order to assert one's separate identity, and avoiding hard work imposed by them (as distinct from that voluntarily undertaken, which may be pursued with great energy). It also frequently involves the desire to sample experiences belonging to the next stage: smoking and drinking, driving or riding a motorbike, learning about sex from X films and flirting with its pleasures - at this age usually stopping short of intercourse. Above all it includes the right to choose one's companions and to find one's own way in personal relationships.

Such autonomy is seen as a condition of self-respect. That it necessarily involves responsibility for the consequences of one's decisions has to be experienced before it is accepted; it cannot be taught by precept. Where responsibility is shunned (as often by the same children who cry for freedom) this may be a sign of anxiety arising from insufficient experience of decision-making in a facilitating environment (Winnicott, 1965); and such anxiety can delay maturation. In adolescence the facilitating environment should include both the peer group and adults "in the background", both providing fall-back support while the young person learns genuine choice and responsibility by manageable, graduated stages. Such an environment cannot be guaranteed in every home. If it can be effectively provided in school, there will be less temptation to daredevilry and other reality-testing experiments elsewhere.

Self-respect also requires a feeling of competence. As many of our children testified and as studies have conclusively shown (Bloom, 1974)

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a constant series of mediocre grades for school work can kill this feeling, with permanent damage to self-esteem. In the long run one may hope that invidious grading systems may be replaced by training in realistic self-assessment by reference to external criteria.

As Hill (1976) makes clear, preparation for work in a broad sense should imbue the whole of education from the primary stage onwards, for it involves the development of personality as a whole. All the constructs we have discovered in children's thinking about their future occupations have validity, even though they cannot all be realized in any job. They are fair demands to make on life, and every young person needs to come to terms with their relative importance for him or her and the possibilities of achieving them in work or otherwise.

Andersson (1977) reviews the problems, recognized in many countries, of turning school from a knowledge shop into a centre for personal development, and describes a Swedish project embracing a number of experimental steps in this direction.

If school is to help its children to develop their full potential as human beings, it should perhaps pay more attention to what they find satisfying and what distressing. A recent Danish education act lays down that every class in the 9 years of the Danish elementary school should have a weekly period for class discussion of any matter the children wish to bring up, and for training in the democratic process. Glasser (1969) has suggested a number of ways of using class discussions for training in group and individual responsibility; Grainger (1966) describes a classroom experiment using the more difficult technique of the leaderless group. Hill & Scharff (1976) ran school groups focussed on the transition from school to work. In such groups the key concepts of freedom and autonomy are of necessity re-examined and redefined, not only through discussion but through experience of freedom in the group itself, and young people support and help one another in their groping toward maturity. In the hands of teachers trained to use them effectively, democratic class meetings could become an invaluable method of fostering a truly facilitative environment for all members of the group, children and adults alike.

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